

# What should we do when the Parachurch replaces the Church?

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*On how Christian Evangelicalism in America has departed from a traditional, Reformed, covenantal view of the Church and replaced it with a view of the Church that is shaped by Pelagianism, Revivalism, and Enlightenment ideology.*

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## When the Parachurch replaces the Church

In my work at Surfside Presbyterian Church in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, I work closely with Campus Outreach, a parachurch ministry to college students. We are now moving into our fifth year together, reaching out to student at Coastal Carolina University. In response to the wishes of the Campus Outreach Regional Directors, my particular role in the ministry has been to operate as a pastoral liason to the C.O. staff and students, providing counseling and direction, and helping establish them in our local church at Surfside. Yet, over these five years, the burden of wedding these young converts to the local church has been no small task. I knew this would be the case going in. I expected struggle. I acknowledged that students with Coastal's demographic – students with practically no church background or Christian worldview – would generally resist the idea of belonging to a church, yielding to a covenant family of believers, and submitting to spiritual authority. I had read 1 and 2 Corinthians many times and I had worked in youth ministry for almost twenty years. I was well versed in the difficulties of helping young people embrace the responsibilities and constraints of living in Biblical community with Christ's covenant body. However, what I did not expect; was the resistance to Church that seemed to be intrinsically built into the Campus Outreach staff and directors. I expected reticence from the students. I did not expect it from the staff.

As a parachurch ministry goes, Campus Outreach should be one of the most trustworthy. Founded in 1978 by Briarwood Presbyterian in Alabama, a flagship church in the PCA, Campus Outreach was born out of a rich, reformed, heritage. Yet, in regard to enfolding itself in the local church, the Campus Outreach ministry seems to be at odds with itself. Let me explain. In the official Campus Outreach literature the organization posits a "*Distinctives*" Statement in which boldly proclaims: "Campus Outreach...believes in a strong relationship with the church. Each regional ministry is

under the authority and leadership of a local church body, which provides a crucial source of accountability, leadership and resources...staff members and students (are) involved in local churches.”<sup>1</sup>

This is certainly a strong statement, yet, when we examine the “*Values*” Statement of the ministry, we get a truer and more robust understanding of what the ministry is all about. The following is a list of what Campus Outreach values in their staff and converts: “A Passion for God and His Glory, Christ-like Character, Value and Authority of God’s Word, Living by Faith, Multiplying Life-on-Life Discipleship, Privilege Mentality, Leadership Development, Love for People, Purpose-driven Living, Pioneering Spirit, Teachability, Christ-centered Focus, and First-generational Thinking.”<sup>2</sup>

At first blush, these seem to be fairly Biblical proclamations. “Passion for God and His Glory” and the “Authority of God’s Word” for example, are certainly ideas that are rooted in Reformed language and thought. But notice some of the other statements. “Privilege Mentality, Pioneering Spirit, Purpose Driven Living, and First Generational Thinking”. What do these phrases even mean? We aren’t told. There is no elaboration of these ideas in any of the material that I have researched and no one that I have spoken to on staff seems to know either. These values are simply stated, not defined. Notice the contrast between a phrase like “Passion for God and His Glory” on the one hand, and “Purpose Driven Living” and “Privilege Mentality” on the other. One statement evokes ideas found in the Westminster Confession and the Chief End of Man. The other statements bring to mind images of Saddleback Church or Joel Osteen’s “Your Best Life Now”. “Privilege Mentality?” What is that? These are a confusing

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<sup>1</sup> “*Our Distinctives*.” Campus Outreach Ministries.  
<http://www.campusoutreach.org/templates/cuscampusoutreach/details.asp?id=28421&PID=181518> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> “*Our Values*.” Campus Outreach Ministries.  
<http://www.campusoutreach.org/templates/cuscampusoutreach/details.asp?id=28421&PID=181525> (accessed April 14, 2009).

mixture of ideas to say the least. Also, notice what is not included in the Values Statement. There is not a single Campus Outreach Value that lays stress upon a proper Understanding of Sin, the Gospel, the Cross, Repentance, or the Atonement of Christ. And maybe most glaring of all, there is no mention of the Church. The closest we get to that is the phrase - "Multiplying Life on Life relationships" – which in actual fact is speaking of contractual accountability – two guys meeting for Bible Study and prayer – and not about the need to belong to an actual, Covenantal body of believing Christians.

The Campus Outreach Strategy statement also neglects this emphasis. The *Four-Fold Strategy* of the ministry is as follows:

- **To Reach** college students with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **To Build** college students into mature disciples of Christ.
- **To Equip** college students to be laborers for Christ.
- **To Mobilize** graduates into their spheres of influence throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>

As good as this strategy sounds, it certainly leaves something to be desired. Where is the statement, "**To Establish** college students as members in a Local Visible Church"? Certainly it may be argued that this emphasis is implied in building college students into mature disciples. But in our current Evangelical climate, should that assumption be made? In conversations with Campus Outreach staff and leaders, I often ask the question, "What is Christian Discipleship"? They seem to most often answer the question using the same general terms – "Discipleship is a life-on-life ministry where we teach our believing students to mature in Bible study, prayer, purity, accountability, and how to witness to other students in order to reach their campus for Christ." Every time I hear that description of discipleship, I grimace. Just two weeks ago, I asked the question of a young lady on Campus Outreach staff. She gave the same answer.

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<sup>3</sup> "Our Strategy." Campus Outreach Ministries.  
<http://www.campusoutreach.org/templates/cuscampusoutreach/details.asp?id=28421&PID=181525> (accessed April 14, 2009).

There is nothing in their discipleship model that advocates church membership. Discipleship seems to almost always be understood as something primarily individualistic, contractual, external, effort based, and focused on mission. In fact, it could be argued that this description, although giving “lip-service” to biblical language, is actually the opposite of Christian discipleship, and in reality is more akin to a life management system that is in essence repackaged pelagianism and enlightenment thinking.

In contrast, a Reformed discipleship takes a different tact. Reformed thought defines discipleship as something communal and covenantal. It is seen as an internal work of the Spirit that has external manifestation. The disciple matures through continually embracing the Gospel, through humble repentance of sin, through the preaching of God’s Word, through the means of grace received in the sacraments, and through the discipline and love of Christ’s body. Reformed Discipleship is not primarily focused on mission *for* Christ. It is primarily focused on worship *of* Christ. Because this is true, an orthodox missional work flows properly out of the cup of orthodox worship. Evangelism and missions flows naturally out of the church and subsequently seeks to fold converts back into her embrace. Orthodox Discipleship doesn’t happen without the Church. Orthodox Mission doesn’t happen without the church. And undeniably, Orthodox Evangelism doesn’t happen without the church. Yet, it seems that this is what we have come to. In present day Evangelicalism, membership in a visible, local church has become negligible, trivial, and marginal.

Evangelicalism has trained young Christian pastors, leaders, and evangelists to think this way. Ironically, the biggest challenge that I have faced in working with Campus Outreach has not been getting Coastal Carolina students to believe in the church. The real strain has come in getting the staff to believe in it. I have been shocked to discover that the Staff – supposed mature disciples of Christ – go about

doing Christian Mission while possessing no real allegiance to or appreciation of the body of Christ. The C.O. staff will work all week proclaiming the gospel to students, straining and praying for spiritual awakening and pressing for professions of faith; yet these very same leaders have no real urgency to establish these new converts in a local church. In fact, students will often come to worship even while the staff do not! Again, the predominant assumption is that belonging to a local, visible church is of minor importance. Church membership is regarded as a banal spiritual commitment that may or may not help the new disciple grow in their faith. The underlying conviction is that it is far more crucial for the disciple to belong to Campus Outreach – to be on mission, to belong to an accountability group, to be doing something ‘big’ for God – than it is essential that they belong to a local church. So then, in effect, the parachurch *replaces* the church. Campus Outreach becomes the church for its new converts.

Now, at this point it may seem as though I am picking on Campus Outreach. Yet, it is not my desire to do. Truly, I have met some incredibly sincere, young, Christian men and women who work with C.O. Furthermore, I have known a great many students who have come to Christ through this good ministry. I do not wish to bury Campus Outreach. They are good folk and dear brothers and sisters in Christ. What I wish to do is point out that even Campus Outreach, a parachurch ministry founded in the rich, Reformed tradition of Briarwood PCA, has fallen victim to the prevailing Evangelical thought that seems to infiltrate every nook and cranny of modern American Protestantism; namely the idea that traditional, Reformed, institutional, covenantal Church is passé. The deconstruction of the Church that began with the pragmatic revivalism of Charles Finney in the Second Great Awakening, has now come full circle. Great numbers of Evangelical Christians gather together all over America. They are politically powerful, economically marketable, and media savvy. Yet, enlightenment thinking and neo-pelagianism rule the day. It should be granted that the philosophy of

Campus Outreach wasn't developed by a group of young college students in a theological vacuum. Their philosophy was handed to them by Pelagius and Finney; taught to them by Bill Hybels and Rob Bell; and sold to them by Brian McLaren and George Barna. So then, the essential question at this point should not be "*What is the relationship between the Church and the Parachurch?*" The critical question is this, "*What should we do when the Parachurch replaces the Church?*"

### **When the Church turns itself into the Parachurch**

Not only has the parachurch replaced the church, but in recent years it seem the church has done everything it can to turn itself into the parachurch. Almost without anyone realizing it, this is what has happened. The line that delineates Biblical ecclesiology and Evangelical mission has become increasingly blurred. Tragically, this blurring has produced an ambiguous amalgamation that has drastically undermined a proper understanding of the Gospel, the church, and mission. Indeed, a great shift has occurred and to understand where and when this shift took place, we need look no further than the events and history surrounding Willow Creek Community Church, located in the suburbs of Chicago Illinois.

In 1975, in Park Ridge Illinois, a young, successful youth pastor named Bill Hybels came up with the groundbreaking idea of re-inventing the church around a parachurch missiology. Hybels had developed a youth ministry called *Son City*, which was built upon principles drawn from youth, parachurch, outreach ministries like *Young Life* and *Youth for Christ*. Along with his fellow *Son City* youth leaders, Hybels decided to plant a church that incorporated contemporary music, drama, and modern media.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, this was quite a departure from the classic, Reformed, confessional

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<sup>4</sup> "*Willow Creek Community Church - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.*" Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willow\\_Creek\\_Community\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willow_Creek_Community_Church) (accessed April 14, 2009).

church model; however, most notable in Hybels' approach was the novel evangelistic philosophy that provided the foundation, and in fact, became the theological epicenter for the new church.

Traditionally, before 1975, the church in America was still drawing from its Reformed history. Church was understood to be a covenant community of believing Christians bound together as the body of Christ. These believers assembled themselves as the visible church, under the submission of trained ordained Elders, to worship God through Biblical Preaching and to participate in the means of grace supplied through the Sacraments. In short, people gathered in Churches to Worship God as the Body of Christ.

The work of parachurch was generally understood to be a 'specialized' missional work of the church. Ideally, Biblical parachurch ministry was designed to act as an arm of the church to reach out to the hurting or the lost and to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. The ultimate aim, however, was not to replace the church, but rather through the proclamation and work of the Gospel, to reconcile people to her. Bill Hybels changed all of that.

In an unprecedented move that would make Charles Finney blush with pride, Hybels redefined church altogether. Worship was no longer seen to be the central focus of the church, but evangelism was placed front and center. Sunday mornings were totally reformatted as "Seeker Services" were installed, deliberately designed to target the unchurched and the curious. Church membership was de-emphasized and accordingly Christian Baptism was marginalized. At Willow Creek, Baptism debates were never an issue because Christian Baptism was no longer relevant. It didn't matter anymore. The Lord's Table was relegated to the Wednesday night "believer's" service. The role of the Pastor or Elder was also re-imagined. No longer were Elders and Pastors to be viewed as spiritual shepherds, theological teachers, or doctrinal

gatekeepers. Instead of ministering word and sacrament, the Pastor was envisioned as the CEO of the church and his chief calling was to be a life-coach to the laity, training them to develop successful habits, encouraging them to a high self-view, and motivating them to missional mobilization. Everything in the church was geared toward the unreached and almost all messages were oriented around a kinder, gentler, neo-pelagian view of innate human goodness, encouraging individuals to reach their spiritual potential through practiced habits and systematized steps. If measured strictly by numerical growth and cultural impact, Willow Creek was a rousing success. The mother church, pastored by Hybels, quickly grew to a congregation of thousands. Hybels and his staff began to plant other churches that were trained under their “Seeker Model”. They wrote books and held huge conferences that were attended by hundreds of motivated clergy, missionaries and church planters. The die was cast. Aside from a handful of Reformed and Traditionalist dissenters, Evangelicalism bought into the new Seeker model, hook-line-and sinker. The church became the parachurch.

### **Corporate Church v. Emergent Conversation**

In the last thirty years, the Pandora’s Box that was opened by Willow Creek has fostered a deconstruction of ecclesiology that has now reached epic proportions. Joel Osteen took the “seeker” model and married it with full on enlightenment, prosperity gospel. Combined with his remarkable charisma and southern charm, Osteen parlayed the seeker model into a multi-million dollar operation. Today Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston Texas is touted as the largest church in the USA, averaging more than 43,000 in attendance per week. Lakewood’s massive congregation meets every Sunday, in multiple services, inside the 16,000-seat Compaq Center – the previous

home of the NBA's Houston Rockets Basketball Team.<sup>5</sup> So obviously bigger is better. Right?

Not everyone thought so. In a reaction against the "big business" corporate model, the likes of Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, and poster boy Rob Bell have endorsed the "emergent conversation" church movement. To be sure, the movement has some merit. It seeks to be small rather than big. It emphasizes community involvement over individualistic actualization. And it attempts to draw direction from early church history with the belief that getting back to something ancient will be its rescue. Yet, at root, the emergent church movement is infected with same neo-pelagianism and enlightenment thinking that is prevalent in Evangelicalism.

In fact, the emergent movement seems to be more reactionary against big corporation Willow Creek Evangelicals than a true return to reformation ecclesiology. Envisioning Bill Hybels standing next to Rob Bell is much like watching the Apple Computer commercials that place the outmoded big business PC Guy next to the cool, laid back Mac Guy. "Hi, I'm PC," says the chubby, corporate businessman. "Hi, I'm Mac," says the cool, messy haired, twenty something. Just like Mac and PC, the emphasis of Hybels and Bell is different. Hybels is powerful and preppy, like PC. Bell is a cool and collegiate, like Mac. Hybels is corporate. Bell is earthy. Hybels believes in big business. Bell believes in small business. Hybels believes in the potential of mass marketing. Bell believes in the potential of niche marketing. Hybels believes Power inspires people. Bell believes Art inspires people.

But even though the seeker church and the emergent church look different on the outside, at the end of the day, the two movements are selling the same product. The underlying foundational ecclesiology is practically identical. Hybels and Bell both believe

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<sup>5</sup> "Lakewood Church - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakewood\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakewood_Church) (accessed April 14, 2009).

that Mission should be the primary focus of the church, not worship. They both believe in reaching human potential through self-effort, instead of dependence upon the Gospel. The Pastor is looked upon as a motivator and visionary, not a shepherd. The sacraments are relegated and trivialized. Church membership is negligible. Church authority and discipline is non-existent. And the Bible is regarded as a moralistic, missional handbook.

Of late, popular Christian statistician George Barna has jumped on the emergent bandwagon, taking church deconstruction to a new level. In 2002, Barna, along with Frank Viola, released a book entitled "*Pagan Christianity?*" In the book, Barna and Viola offer an alternative to the Mega Church movement: a return to house churches as we find in the New Testament. Viola aims at a house church where anyone of any gender or age can do anything at anytime. In chapter five, titled "The Pastor: The Obstacle to Every Member", Viola especially attacked the validity of the Pastorate in particular, and church authority in general. He states, "Organic churches (should be) characterized by Spirit-led, open, participatory meetings (with) nonhierarchical leadership."<sup>6</sup> In their ecclesiology, Viola and Barna leave no room for Elder rule or authority. In fact, the church should have no specific leadership at all. In other chapters, Viola attacks the validity of church liturgy, preaching, tithing, and the sacraments. Finally he takes the gloves off when he says, "the church in its contemporary, institutional form has neither a biblical nor a historical right to function as it does."<sup>7</sup>

In effect, what he really seems to say is, "The church has no right to exist at all." Is it any wonder that my Campus Outreach friends hold the church in such low regard? Whether they shop on a Mac or a PC, whether they drink Glenlivet Scotch or sip Starbucks Coffee, at heart, they are simply buying the same product that Evangelicalism

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<sup>6</sup> George Barna & Frank Viola, *Pagan Christianity?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 20082), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

is selling.

## **Self-Feeding Christians: Infants without a Mother**

Since 1975, thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, have been reached through the Evangelical Seeker model of church. However, in recent years, Willow Creek has begun to re-think their philosophy. On October 18, 2007, Christianity Today reported an apology issued by Bill Hybels. In findings from a multiple year qualitative study of its ministry, Willow Creek admitted that though they were attracting large numbers of people, they were not, in fact, producing mature disciples of Christ.

Speaking at the 2007 *Leadership Summit*, Hybels summarized their findings this way:

“Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back, it wasn’t helping people that much. Other things that we didn’t put that much money into and didn’t put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.”<sup>8</sup>

After thirty years of creating and promoting a multi-million dollar organization driven by programs and measuring participation, and convincing other church leaders to do the same, Hybels confessed:

“We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become ‘self feeders.’ We should have gotten people, (and taught them) how to read their bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.”<sup>9</sup>

Did you catch that? Although Hybels bemoans the fact that relatively few mature disciples are being produced, notice that he has a long way to go in understanding and recovering the essentials of a Biblical Church. Hybels says that Willow Creek should have spent time helping believers become “self-feeders” and taught them “how to do the

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<sup>8</sup> "Willow Creek Repents." Out of Ur. [blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/10/willow\\_creek\\_re.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html) (accessed April 10, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

spiritual practices on their own.” The emphasis is still far from embracing the Biblical model of Gospel Covenant Community. Hybels’ language indicates that he still regards spiritual maturity as something that occurs through individual self-effort and discipline and not through the means of Grace that Christ extends to His Body through the church. Sadly, it seems that Willow Creek has “birthed” a great many children for which they are unable, unprepared, or unwilling to take responsibility. Hybels sounds a bit like the young teenaged boy who sleeps with his girlfriend in the back seat of his car, who, upon hearing that his girlfriend is pregnant mumbles sheepishly, “Gee whiz, I’m not ready to raise a baby. That wasn’t part of the plan. Oh well, I sure hope the little guy figures out a way to feed himself.”

Obviously, Evangelicalism has produced a lot of spiritual babies, yet there seems to have been too much thought given to *having* spiritual babies while there has been far too little thought applied in regard to *raising* them. In fairness, this idea of “self-feeding” has some credibility. Clearly, the church should equip young believers to study God’s Word and practice personal devotion to Christ. However, this personalized idea of “self-practiced” sanctification must be rejected on the whole. Nowhere does the scripture impart to us an idea of sanctification that should occur outside of the Christian covenant community. Hebrews 3:12-13 says:

“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

In his book *“Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands”*, Paul David Tripp comments on this passage in Hebrews:

“The reality of spiritual blindness has important implication for the Christian community. The Hebrews passage clearly teaches that personal insight is the product of community. I need (the church) in order to really see and know myself. Otherwise, I will listen to my own argument, believe my own lies, and buy into my own delusions. My self-perception is (about) as accurate as a carnival mirror. If I am going to see myself

clearly, I need (the church) to hold the mirror of God's Word in front of me."<sup>10</sup>

Noted reformed journalist Jonathan Leeman adds to the thought of Tripp. In *Modern Reformation* magazine, Leeman writes,

"The Christian life must be lived through the local church because that's what Christ has made us...members of his body...We're called to submit to the authority and discipline of a local church because we have submitted to the authority and discipline of Christ (e.g., Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; Heb. 13:17)...Union with Christ means union with his body and that union with the body must be put on, enacted, lived out with real, step-on-your-toes people. It's through the local church that Christians are able to display the glorious character of God in a way we cannot on our own."<sup>11</sup>

Evangelicalism seems to have missed this point. Ultimately, Christians are not meant to "self-feed". Yet, George Barna, in his book, *Revolution*, anticipates a rising demographic of "Revolutionaries" who will move "beyond the established church and choose to *be* the church instead."<sup>12</sup> He suggests that since church is a matter of individual choice and effort, all Christians will need are resources for their own work of personal and spiritual transformation. Who needs the church? "Based on our research," Barna relates, "I have projected that by the year 2010, 10 to 20 percent of Americans will derive all their spiritual input (and output) through the Internet."<sup>13</sup> "In just a few years," Barna predicts, "we will see that millions of people will never travel physically to a church, but will instead roam the Internet in search of meaningful spiritual experiences."<sup>14</sup>

Barna does not criticize this direction, but heartily endorses it saying that Jesus' heart has always been character development, not covenant belonging. Intimate worship, says Barna, does "not require a '(church) worship service,'" just a personal

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<sup>10</sup> Tripp, Paul David, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Leeman, "Individualism v. Community" *Modern Reformation*, Vol. 17 No. 4 (July/August 2008) p. 27-31.

<sup>12</sup> George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), back cover copy

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>14</sup> George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word, 1998), p. 96.

commitment to the Bible, prayer, and discipleship.<sup>15</sup> Barna's recurring implication is that in order to mature and pursue a robust Christian faith, the disciple must abandon the Church and become a risk taking, missional minded, self-feeder. Tragically, this sounds just like what I've been hearing from our Campus Outreach Staff.

Michael Horton, Reformed Professor of Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, comments on this idea of self-feeding. He laments, "(So) this is finally where American spirituality leaves us: alone, surfing the Internet, casting about for coaches and teammates, trying to save ourselves from captivity to this present age by finding those "excitements" that will induce a transformed life." Standing bodily opposed to the theology of nineteenth century revivalist Charles Finney, Horton calls Evangelicalism out of its self-reliant stupor,

"The individualistic emphasis of evangelicalism stands in sharp contrast to the covenantal paradigm that we find in Scripture. We are commanded not to become self-feeders who mature beyond the nurture of the church, but to submit ourselves to the preaching, teaching, and oversight of those shepherds whom God has placed over us in Christ... "Obey your leaders and submit to them," Scripture exhorts, "for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17-18).<sup>16</sup>

Horton makes the case from Scripture crystal clear. We are not designed to feed ourselves. The Lord's admonition to Peter at the end of John's Gospel was not, "Peter, feed yourself! And teach others to feed themselves!" No, not at all. The imperative given to Peter that day was the command given to every Pastor and every Church. "Feed my Lambs." Horton says that, "through his under-shepherds Jesus will continue to feed his sheep and lead them to everlasting pastures. The church's ministry is exercised faithfully when the people are fed, not when the sheep are expected to

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<sup>15</sup> Barna, *Revolution*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Michael S. Horton, "No Church, No Problem" *Modern Reformation*, Vol. 17 No. 4, (July/August 2008) p. 16-20.

become their own shepherds.”<sup>17</sup>

Augustine is often quoted as saying, “The church is a whore, but she is my mother all the same.” If it is true that the church is our mother, then we need to understand that, imperfect as she may be, if we are to be fed as Christians, it will be the church that feeds us. Ultimately, we cannot feed ourselves. We cannot feed ourselves the Lord’s Supper, or baptize ourselves, or preach to ourselves, or counsel ourselves. Christian Maturity is not defined by fleshly dependence upon the self, it is learning the way of grace-filled dependence upon Christ and His Church. The epistles bear this out. Just like us, the Corinthian church was needy. Just like us, they needed Christ. They needed the Spirit. But, they also needed each other. They needed to understand and embrace covenant community. They needed pastors and teachers. They needed instruction. They needed prayer. They needed Paul. Spiritual maturity does not mean that we grow beyond these needs. On the contrary, a mature Christian grows in his understanding of those needs and learns to work in cooperation with Christ and His Church instead of in opposition to it.

I have a friend who works in nursing. She related to me that nurses who work in labor and delivery are now being taught to immediately, upon the birth of the baby, lay the child upon the mother’s breast to feed, so that the baby will bond to the mother as soon as possible. Many pediatric units are doing this even before they cut the umbilical cord. This should also be the practice of evangelists and missionaries in regard to a new convert. The first order of business should be to establish that new convert in a local church where he can be fed the very milk of Christ. And to be sure, the mature disciple does not grow past this need. He grows from needing milk to needing meat. But whether milk or meat, the Christian should always expect to be fed by Christ while sitting at his mother’s table.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

## Epilogue

This past year I have had many conversations with Campus Outreach staff and students about the importance of joining a local church. Slowly, they are beginning to buy in. On any given Sunday we will have as many as fifty college students piled together in a cramped room, upstairs in our education building. I have been teaching through Hebrews this year; teaching covenant theology; teaching about church and the Gospel and the beauty of Christ our High Priest and the excellency of His great work on behalf of the elect. About twelve students who are thinking about joining the church are coming to my house on Sunday nights. One Coastal student is training to be a youth leader. Beautiful. About three weeks ago my heart was filled with joy when I peeked into the nursery and saw a Coastal college student holding a baptized covenant baby in her arms. I think they are starting to believe.

Meanwhile, I am working for the day when I see Campus Outreach make room for one more bullet point in their outreach strategy: “**To Establish** college students as members in a Local Visible Church”. That will be a great day indeed.

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